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AGDA-A (M) (22 Feb 71) ~~OT-UT-71B~~ 13

1 March 1971

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: ~~...~~
I Field Force Vietnam, Period 15 February 1970 through 9 January 1971 (U)

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1. Reference: AR 1-26, subject, Senior Officer Debriefing Program (U) dated 4 November 1966.

2. Transmitted herewith is the report of LTG A. S. Collins, Jr. subject as above.

3. This report is provided to insure appropriate benefits are realized from the experiences of the author. The report should be reviewed in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 5, AR 1-26; however, it should not be interpreted as the official view of the Department of the Army, or of any agency of the Department of the Army.

4. Information of actions initiated under provisions of AR 1-26, as a result of subject report should be provided to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, ATTN: FOR OT UT within 90 days of receipt of covering letter.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

Verne L. Bowers

VERNE L. BOWERS
Major General, USA
Acting The Adjutant General

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AVHDO-DO

9 FEB 1971


SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report -
Lieutenant General A. S. Collins, Jr

Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development
Department of the Army
Washington D.C. 20310

1. Inclosed are three copies of the Senior Officer Debriefing Report prepared by LTG A. S. Collins, Jr. The report covers the period February 1970 thru January 1971 during which time LTG Collins served as Commanding General, I Field Force Vietnam.
2. LTG Collins is recommended as a guest speaker at appropriate service schools and joint colleges.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

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2 cy wd HQ DA


Clark W. Stevens Jr.
Captain, AUC
Assistant Adjutant General


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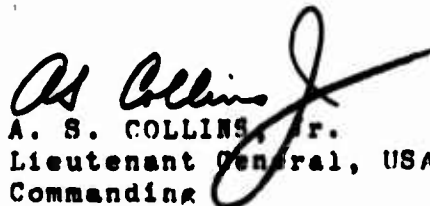
6 January 1971

SUBJECT: Senior Officers Debriefing Report (RCS-CSFOR-74) (U)

Commanding General
Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam
ATTN: AVHDO-DO
APO 96375

1. Reference letter AVHAG-PO, subject: Senior Officers Debriefing Program, dated 31 December 1970.
2. In accordance with paragraph 2, AR 1-26, and paragraph 5a, USARV Regulation 1-3, attached are five copies of subject report covering my assignment as Commanding General, I Field Force Vietnam.

1 Incl
as


A. S. COLLINS, Jr.
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding

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DEBRIEFING REPORT (RCS-CSFOR-74) (U)

Country: Republic of Vietnam

Debrief Report by: Lieutenant General A. S. Collins, Jr.

Duty Assignment: Commanding General, I Field Force Vietnam

Inclusive Dates: 15 February 1970 through 9 January 1971

Date of Report: 7 January 1971



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PREFACE


This report addresses only major substantive issues that warrant future study.


I have divided the report into five parts as follows:

General Overview

- I -- Comments on ARVN, VNAF, and GVN Operations
- II -- Comments on US Forces and Operations
- III -- Comments on ROK Operations
- IV -- Pacification
- V -- Summation

Because we must recognize shortcomings and try to do something about them, this report dwells more on shortfalls than it does on accomplishments. It deals solely with my observations and inquiries in MR 2 and hence may not have country-wide application.


A. S. COLLINS, Jr.
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding



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General Overview

The planning and general guidelines on the strategic concept and the four seasonal campaign plans provide superb terms of reference for the conduct of military operations and leave no question in the mind of the commander as to the mission, objectives, or what is to be accomplished. In my judgment, the strategic direction which resulted in the elimination of the Cambodian sanctuaries will stand out as the most important decision of the Vietnam war as well as the most decisive operation mounted by the allies. It definitely was a turning point in MR 2.

The cooperation between the services has been so good that it is just accepted and thus is not cause for concern or discussion.

Pacification has been conducted through CORDS, a unique organization working under a military commander with a civilian deputy and combining the efforts of State, USAID, USIS, JUSPAO, other civilian agencies, and the military all coordinated through one office. In fact, the various components are so intermingled that it causes the comptrollers major headaches. This combined organization of the military and the civilian in the form of CORDS is paralleled right down through the military regions and may be one of the most startling innovations of this war.

It has worked!

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By virtue of what I see today, the progress since I left the country in '67 is so marked that when one reads the critical comments contained in the body of this report, one is likely to lose sight of what has been accomplished in the last few years. This must not be done. In 1967 and early 1968, the ARVN did very little. Moreover, the RF/PF in that period were neither active nor effective. In 1968 the VC were strong and capable of a major Tet offensive. Now, in late 1970, ARVN has the most effective fighting forces in MR 2. The RF/PF are steady performers, get better daily, and provide security to hamlets and villages formerly under VC control. The VC are weak and have great problems in every area in which they operate -- problems in obtaining food, problems of morale, and problems of recruiting.

The progress of pacification has been marked. From November 1968 to November 1970, the percentage of the region's population under VC control has declined from 7.6 to 0.1 percent. Rice production in MR 2 has increased from 400,000 tons in 1968 to an estimated 650,000 tons in 1970, so that the region as a whole is verging of self sufficiency. Village and hamlet chiefs have been elected and I consider this to be a major step forward in pacification and return to local elected governments which might give the people some semblance of association with the GVN. Traffic on the roads and highways is heavy and ever increasing. Many other pacification objectives have been achieved. In the past all too often the VC have had the upper hand. Now it is obvious that the GVN is in the driver's seat.

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Recent results of the Pacification Attitude Analysis System are equally revealing. Attitude surveys over the past six months show a definite trend toward increased confidence of the people in their government and in its ability to respond to their needs.

The success of the pacification program has been such that we now begin to see the various political factions bickering with one another and causing internal frictions that will make it difficult for the government to achieve stability and eventual victory. This is one of the prices the Vietnamese pay for progress, added security, and movement toward the democratic form of government which is so difficult for a new nation with strong internal conflicts.

I emphasize progress in these introductory comments because the main body of this report focuses on those areas in which corrective action is essential if final objectives are to be achieved in Vietnam. Critical comments as they pertain to US operations and policy concern areas we must address in our own study and future actions. When one is critical in a report, there is always a tendency for someone to extract that part of the criticism which he thinks supports his point of view without recognizing the tremendous accomplishments and achievements that are there for all to see. Taken out of context, these criticisms distort the picture. In this report, I have not commented on the things done well so much as I have identified those areas which I consider most critical and in need of attention. If I may use a

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homely analogy, we are in the last five minutes of the last quarter of a tough ball game in which the line has been slugging it out and a few more hard nosed plays are necessary to ensure final victory. If that victory is to be achieved, the areas identified in the body of this report must be addressed and corrected.

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PART I

ARVN AND GVN OPERATIONS

1. ARVN Forces.

Until September 1970, the ARVN forces in II Corps were certainly less than impressive. Basically, their weakness can be traced to one thing, lack of leadership. I was impressed with few of the commanders. The general officers seldom got out to see what was going on. Field grade officers, to include regimental and battalion commanders, acted as though it was beneath their dignity to observe training. There just seemed to be a feeling among ARVN officers that, having made a certain grade, they had done their part and from that point on they were going to take it easy. From my observation, and from those of all advisors, the individual Vietnamese soldier is a good soldier. He deserves better leadership. He began to get it only after General Dzu took command.

Over the years, we have made too many excuses for the ARVN. We have had a training program in this country for 15 years, and therefore senior ARVN officers know what has to be done. Much of the difficulty stems from the promotion of incompetents, and keeping them in positions of responsibility long after they have proved themselves inadequate. This is a situation that is difficult for us to correct since the ARVN must run its own promotion and selection system. One of the essential ingredients for the success of this government is a system for selecting the

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most competent people in both the civilian agencies and military forces while ensuring simultaneously that the incompetents are marked and removed from positions of responsibility. This is a core problem that demands recognition and positive action by the Vietnamese, especially since it is a recurring problem as evidenced by the following quotation from General Peers' Senior Officer's Debriefing Report of 1968:

The ARVN forces in II Corps have matured considerably during the past year. This is so for a variety of reasons, including the leadership of General Lu Lan... A year ago, three ARVN regimental size units in II Corps were woefully weak -- all because of the lack of leadership at the regimental and battalion level. The assignment of officers down to battalion level is centralized in JCS, and the Corps Commander cannot move such commanders without their approval. It required in excess of six months on the part of General Lu Lan and myself, working through our individual channels, to replace the incompetent commanders. Once this came about, it was almost as though a miracle had taken place. These formerly inadequate units rapidly developed into some of the best ARVN combat units in all of the II Corps.

Frankly, I do not know what happened between 1968-1970. If the ARVN combat units had improved as much as indicated by General Peers, somewhere along the line they had again slipped back a long way, because on my arrival in February 1970 I found them woefully weak because of lack of leadership at the regimental and battalion level.

Superb performances by the ARVN 1st and 2nd Divisions in MR 1, and improvement in the 25th Division in MR 3 in 1969-1970, have shown that proper leadership is available and can produce results.

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For a country where survival is at stake, it is difficult to understand the long delay in getting better leadership to MR 2. General Dzu has transformed all this by his very encouraging start and has provided, at least initially, dynamic leadership. If General Dzu's energetic efforts continue, government control in MR 2 will be strengthened with each passing month, but he needs help in the form of good leaders.

2. RF/PF.

The performance of RF/PF was one of the most encouraging signs in MR 2 at a time when ARVN units were ineffective. Though the RF/PF took a lot of casualties, month in, month out, they accounted for more of the enemy than the US, the ROK, or the ARVN regular forces. Admittedly, there are more RF/PF; admittedly, the enemy concentrated on RF/PF units in an effort to destroy or annihilate them, but the fact remains they have been improving gradually. RF/PF units stood their ground quite well at a time when they received little help from the ARVN during a period in which ARVN often failed to go to their assistance when they were attacked. This was a major shortcoming of the ARVN through September 1970. It now appears that it is about to be overcome. This basically optimistic forecast for RF/PF in MR 2 must be tempered by the existence of two chronic problems. On the one hand, units are rarely maintained at full strength; on the other, the RF/PF in some areas persist in trying to provide security from static, hilltop positions. It doesn't work, and so

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situated they provide little real protection to the village or hamlet -- and they are a sitting duck for the VC on the night the VC decide to attack that position. The reason the VC are almost assured of success is that most elements of such an outpost will undoubtedly be asleep. Every disaster we have investigated resulted from that one failing -- sleeping -- no one on the alert.

3. VNAF Rotary Wing Support.

VNAF rotary wing support of ARVN is inadequate. VNAF simply does not provide the support warranted by the number of helicopters available.

The primary cause of the inadequate support is VNAF's insistence that its helicopters must return to the fixed base facility at Nha Trang every night. They will not remain overnight at forward operating locations. This causes excessive dead blade time while commuting to and from the area of operations. It is estimated that about 23 percent of VNAF's total helicopter blade time is expended in commuting from the fixed base to the area of operations and returning. With the alternating monsoon and dry seasons between the highlands and the coastal Provinces, weather conditions often preclude reliable flight schedules. The weather, coupled with the extended distances involved, make the reliability and responsiveness of VNAF unsatisfactory.

The dead blade time commuting problem is only partly alleviated as additional VNAF helicopter squadrons are activated.

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All additional squadrons are programmed for stationing at Pleiku. Given the VNAF obsession with returning each night to its fixed base, substantial helicopter commuting with the associated dead blade time will still be required into the northeastern and southwestern provinces of MR 2.

VNAF is reluctant to perform any type mission at night, regardless of the urgency. USAF advisors have tried to push a night training program, but the VNAF have not been interested. There is no VNAF medical evacuation at night; daytime dustoff is marginal at best.

VNAF support is further degraded by their refusal to fly on Sundays, a general lack of a sense of urgency, ARVN's inability as the supported activity to influence VNAF as the supporter, and VNAF's inflexible tasking procedures.

4. Level of Effort.

The US level of effort in Vietnam was much too large. This view may well reflect my basic belief that President Nixon's program for drawdown is the right one and that only as the Vietnamese are convinced that we really are going to leave will they begin to do things for themselves -- things they have been capable of doing for a long time. In the past, whenever something had to be done, the Vietnamese could wait and look over their shoulder until an American counterpart, or an American unit, did the job for them. Now that they see US units leaving, they are beginning to shoulder the burden that is appropriately theirs to bear.

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This judgment applies equally to GVN/ARVN dependence upon advisory personnel. After numerous visits to district advisory teams, MAT teams, and other US advisory groups, it is clear to me that our advisors are looked on by their GVN counterparts as a source of support rather than as an advisor -- as the sure route to gunships, medevac, artillery support, or some other form of materiel support. Their advice is seldom heeded and often not wanted. The ARVN and GVN officials are capable of doing what is required on their own if they will but do it. In CORDS, until recently, there was a reluctance to cut the advisory effort significantly. Clearly, to provide MATS teams and other advisors to commanders who have been fighting for nine to ten years no longer makes sense. GVN civilian and military officials know what is right and what is wrong, and they heed advisors only when it suits their convenience. The advisory effort should be cut drastically.

5 Selection of Personnel and Retention of Incompetents.

Perhaps one of the most discouraging features of GVN operations is the long delay between identification and confirmation of an incompetent and his eventual replacement. The future of this country is not assured, and the best insurance for survival is to get the most competent people in the key jobs. Delay in replacement of district chiefs who were admittedly inadequate often took several months. The same applied to regimental commanders. Because these positions are so important and influence

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such a large area, it is inconceivable that competent personnel could not be found for the positions! In the highlands, all province chiefs complain that they are assigned officials to fill key positions who are being punished. Further, good police officials, province officials, or district chiefs want no part of the highlands. This negative attitude must be overcome. If this government is to survive, it must find an appeal such that a segment of its leadership will be willing to make the self sacrifice necessary for the survival of the country. The VC develop dedication and sacrifice! The GVN must do likewise!

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PART 11

COMMENTS ON US FORCES AND OPERATIONS

What follows on US Army operations is quite critical because it is our business as professional soldiers to look for shortcomings, analyze them, and then do something about them. But to be sure that these comments are not taken out of context, I would preface this section with this general observation.

As a commander, I can only marvel at the dedication and performance of the US soldier here in Vietnam. His sacrifice has been great and his bravery unmatched. In this war, the military have been so poorly supported by all the media that influence public opinion, the events so distorted in the reporting, and the positions of many members of the Congress so hostile to the US commitment, that the great mystery to me is how or why our soldiers go on and do their job as well as they do. He has good leadership, but that alone would not do it. It is some intangible strength inherent in the character of our people, and we commanders are fortunate that this is so and that we have this quality on which to draw.

In the material sphere, the serviceman in Vietnam could not have been better served -- but this has caused problems, some of which are reflected in this section. On the psychological or inspirational side, the serviceman could hardly have been more poorly served. Both of these aspects also contributed to the shortcomings outlined herein.

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1. Discipline and Standards.

The US Army, confronted by a hostile press, lack of support for the war at home, and beset by problems of race and drugs, deteriorated in Vietnam; bizarre uniforms, shirts and helmets not worn in combat situations that warranted them, the excessive number of accidental shootings -- too many of which appeared other than "accidental" -- and the promiscuous throwing of grenades that lent new meaning to the expression "fragging" should leave all of us with an ill-at-ease feeling. Add to this the number of incidents along LOC's resulting from speeding, shooting from vehicles, or from hurling miscellaneous items at Vietnamese on the roads. When these indicators of lower standards are combined with the number of friendly casualties caused by our own fire due to short rounds or misplaced fire, or by other accidents caused by carelessness, it appears to me that we have a serious disciplinary problem which has resulted in operational slippages.

The superb support that provided stacks of paper plates, hot meals, ice cream, and mountains of beer and soft drinks in the forward area, raises a question as to our appreciation of the unchanging and harsh demands of a combat environment as opposed to our insistence upon all the good things of life. We must again learn to be Spartan.

Another factor of significant impact is the fact that our society has become extremely permissive. Because any Army reflects the society from which it springs, the US Army likewise has become permissive, and standards and discipline have been eroded proportionately. What everyone must realize is that there is a question as to how far we can travel on this road and still perform our mission effectively.

2. Base and Logistics Support.

The large base camps in Vietnam turned into quite a burden. A much more austere environment would not have placed such a drain on national resources, and I believe austerity would have permitted more flexible and effective functioning of the combat force. More tent camps or field locations would have encouraged a more austere outlook and acceptance of a field environment, and the war could have been fought with far less cost and greater "foxhole" strength. In addition, I believe that disciplinary problems in the rear areas would have been reduced.

I have already mentioned some of the luxuries we provide to our Army. I would only add that we have too much of everything. We maintain too much ammunition in our forward supply points - certainly for this type of war. We have too much ammunition in firing positions, which results occasionally in avoidable catastrophic accidents when a stray enemy mortar or recoilless rifle round gets into one of the ammunition storage sites.

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Too many CONEXES, too much wire, too many vehicles -- just too much! It appears to me that major savings in the cost of our operations can ensue from cutting down on having so much of everything available.

3. Firepower.

The US Army carries the use of firepower to extremes. One can always find the officer who will say, "I'll use any amount of supporting fire to save one American soldier." That sounds great, and no one will ever be faulted for so saying. But that isn't necessarily the right way to do things, no matter how good it sounds. Men are lost loading, unloading, transporting, and protecting these massive amounts of firepower we move forward. We shoot so much that we have accidents that kill or maim our own people, or others. It is time we got this firepower under far tighter control. Unbridled firepower has not made us a better or a more effective Army.

In almost any contact -- even if it involves only one or two enemy -- commanders invariably call for artillery, gunship, or air support, and sometimes for all three. More often than not, by the time our troops wait for this support and commanders get it coordinated, the enemy is gone. We must do much more to stress the importance of small unit tactics and the habitual use of rifles, M-79's, and grenades to close with and eliminate small enemy units. When we have a large enemy unit, or when he is well dug in, we properly should use all the firepower available to get him out -- but we routinely follow

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the overwhelming firepower route, regardless of enemy strength and size. At the other extreme, when we do have a target that warrants hundreds of rounds of artillery, we often have given that target the gunship, tactical airstrike, battery concentration routine instead of pounding the hell out of it with artillery and walking in under the artillery fire. I am not impressed with our use of firepower, which has been wasteful, inefficient, and lacking the stamp of the true professional.

4. Relations with the Vietnamese.

Over the past six months -- at least from my reading of the serious incident reports -- I get the feeling that there is a critical attitude developing on the part of the Vietnamese with respect to the US soldier. This attitude borders on hostility. Some of it is fomented, but most of it derives from a number of inconveniences, petty insults, or injuries that many Vietnamese people have suffered over the years from US forces -- particularly from the large number of fast-moving vehicles that we have in country which have caused many serious accidents. This Vietnamese attitude may well be coming to the surface because of their knowledge that we are leaving. Resentment has been a cross we have had to bear with any country we have helped. People are always willing to take our assistance, but once we start to go, these same people feel that we are letting them down. We now have several instances each month in which US soldiers who get in accidents or difficulty have weapons

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levelled at them by local ARVN or RF/PF units. This pattern, if unchecked, could create a serious and explosive situation. Rapid, forceful command action is essential in all such cases.

5. Serious Incidents - Discipline.

Much of the hostility we now encounter has been cumulative and the greater part of it stems from the lowered standards of discipline and attitude referred to in paragraph 1 of this section. We have had far too many reports of civilians being fired upon from US vehicles and convoys. The less serious but nonetheless irritating act of throwing cans and rocks at Vietnamese from passing vehicles adds to the hostility. These isolated instances, while indulged in by a very small minority of the US forces, do grave damage to our good relations with the Vietnamese. Thoughtless and undisciplined acts of this type quickly destroy the good relations created by the constructive efforts of splendid soldiers, fine units, and good commanders over a long period of time. The chain of command has had too much of a tendency to ignore these acts. On the other hand, when they were reported, there invariably seemed to be an inability to identify the offender. Even when identified, the chances for punitive or corrective actions were made extremely difficult by the current restrictions imposed by the UCMJ and the rapid rotation of potential witnesses. These acts are not "horseplay" and should not be viewed with a tolerant "boys will be boys" attitude.

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6. Dustoff.

We need to look closely at our dustoff procedures which have been so well executed and which have saved so many lives in Vietnam. In studying the failure of IFFV units to get better results in our contacts with the enemy during the latter part of 1970, I became increasingly convinced that our dustoff capability might be hampering our operations. When the enemy opens up and causes a casualty, it seems that much of the effort is diverted from the enemy and concentrated on ensuring that the casualty is quickly evacuated. Platoon leaders and sergeants get tied up on the radio calling for medevac or in providing security for the incoming chopper. We must again learn to let the medic and an RTO handle casualty evacuation while the unit vigorously pushes against and maintains contact with the enemy. Few of our young officers and NCO's really comprehend the idea that the best way to assist the casualty is to maintain pressure on the enemy so that medevac operations can be conducted in a safe environment.

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PART III

COMMENTS ON ROK OPERATIONS

1. Republic of Korea Forces.

The ROK forces are deliberate and methodical in all that they do. Once they undertake a mission, they do a superb job of it. They are aggressive and thorough, and one can be certain that any area they search out has been thoroughly covered. However, they make excessive demands for choppers and support and once having completed an operation, they frequently stand down for six weeks to two months. The cumulative results that we get from a two division ROK force equates to what one can expect from one good US brigade. The first eight months of my tour, I went to great lengths to ensure that the ROK forces received the support they asked for. I am also certain that this policy was followed by all my predecessors. I now believe I made a mistake in bending over backwards to see to it that their needs were so fully accommodated. But this is one of the judgments that a commander has to make. I felt it was in our national interest to so act. In spite of this all-out support, the ROKS did not undertake as many operations as they could and should have. I have come to believe that a more distant, less accommodating position might have gained us more respect and cooperation, but whether it would have made them any more active, I just don't know.

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Every province and district senior advisor complained to me about the ROK indifference to the concerns of the province and district chiefs. We received many hints from the Vietnamese that the ROKS had committed atrocities. Only a few of these allegations were clearly supported. However, there were so many instances of questionable actions that there must have been some basic disregard of the rights of the Vietnamese by the ROK soldiers.

The ROKS were notorious for their sharp practices in black market activities, currency manipulations, and supply operations. This notoriety was well earned. When their trick was called, they adjusted. The lesson for us is that when dealing with a foreign force, we should be most stringent in the provision of resources. In fact, we should lean on the side of giving too little rather than too much. The ROKS consistently "fired" all of their artillery ASR, even when the results showed no enemy killed or wounded. I wonder how many of the "expended" artillery rounds were shipped back to Korea on the transports? Had we insisted on flying the ROKS to and from Vietnam -- as we do our own troops -- we would have saved a pretty penny. I understand that many of the ROK privileges and their high level of support stem from agreements made in Korea at the time their support in Vietnam was being sought. These agreements should be studied to learn from our mistakes.

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PART IV

PACIFICATION

In 1968, a program for the pacification and development of this country was set in motion. To a degree, it was a disciplined and scientific approach that encompassed many aspects of varying importance and purpose. These aspects ranged from village elections and self-development programs to the introduction of pure-bred swine, and any number of interrelated activities such as the creation of the PSDF and a major effort to improve the Regional and Popular Forces. What is most impressive is that this program is working. Good progress has been made. Almost every intelligence report indicates that the VC are concerned with the success of the pacification program, and this probably is the best indicator we could have of the success of this endeavor.

Two exceptions to the overall success of the program are the Phung Hoang and the VIS program. In the Phung Hoang program, there is a reluctance by the people and the officials to get with it. In many areas, the attitude of the people is understandable, since many members of their immediate families -- sons, daughters, husbands -- have been working with the VC. If the Phung Hoang program were successful, chances are that many loved ones might wind up dead or in jail. They also are concerned for their own survival, for there is no question that the terrorist activities of the VC, their constant presence, and their ability to exert influence and assassinate individuals, provide a level of

control sufficient to make the people reluctant to come forward and identify the VC.

The VIS program has thus far not lived up to its promises. This program is ineffective because local officials are not really explaining the various pacification and development programs to the people, although it is easy to claim 100% of goal completion in terms of village meetings. Motivating these officials to do a better job is a major problem for our advisors. The ineffectiveness of VIS has a direct bearing on Phung Hoang. Most of the people have little real understanding of the VC shadow government. If they knew the extent of its tax collection activities, for example, they might be more willing to cooperate in neutralizing the VC infrastructure. But with these two exceptions, the pacification program has been a singular success and will be a major contributing factor in the eventual stabilization and progress of the GVN.

Although the overall pacification program has been a success and progress has been great, much more could be achieved by the correction of one critical shortcoming -- a better system for firing incompetent district chiefs and selecting competent replacements. The replacement of poor province chiefs resulted not only in better province chiefs being assigned, but also had a salutary effect on the whole system. However, we still have too many district chiefs who are inadequate if not incompetent.

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Further, it frequently takes six to eight months to get a poor district chief replaced. We still find district chiefs who failed in Province A suddenly showing up in Province B as a district chief. The district chief is so close to the people and is so vital to the security considered essential to pacification that it is difficult to understand why the GVN cannot see the risks it will run unless it does better in this important area.

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PART V

SUMMATION

From time to time during my tour as Commanding General, I Field Force Vietnam, I put down in writing my reactions to conditions when observations were fresh in my mind. These observations reflected not just one incident, but generally resulted from visits over time both to ARVN units and provincial activities. My observations encompassed many things -- attitude, individual reaction, and comments, as well as a wide range of people -- and all combined to leave a lasting impression on me. Perhaps the one message that came through repeatedly and insistently was the attitude of the people. It could almost be summed up in the words "they don't care." It is reflected in the police official who will not report to Phu Bon because it is too far from Saigon, or the villagers who watch three or four VCI enter a village, shoot the village chief and then walk out while RD cadre, PSDF, and even PF stand by doing nothing.

I am always left with the vague, uneasy feeling that the people don't care who wins. They just want to be left alone. Surely they do not evidence a real desire to wipe out the VCI which assassinates their neighbors, blows up their busses and bridges, and otherwise makes life difficult and hazardous. To the contrary, these acts go virtually unpunished although the people have a pretty good idea who the VCI are.

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The GVN has been given all the material resources it needs to sustain itself. It does need a little more time to consolidate the gains it has been making since the 1968 Tet, and which have been accelerated by driving the NVA and VC from their Cambodian sanctuaries adjacent to the border. If the present rate of US withdrawal is maintained, additional time will be available to the GVN. In my judgment, the country will continue to make progress in a very shaky manner, able to go either way depending on the pressures of the moment. If it can rock along for a couple of years, and if, in the meantime, dedicated civilians get into the provincial jobs, join in at the national level and in the Army, the GVN might make it. But it is going to be a very dicey course because the apparent indifference of the people and the lack of dedication of many leaders is no match for the determination and energy of the VC.

Though the VC are ruthless, they must be admired for the dedication they display to their cause under what are now most trying conditions. In adversity, they mount superb small unit operations, and their psychological and organizational ability poses a threat to the GVN every day. My last impression is that outside of the family group the Vietnamese are basically a rather selfish and self-centered people. Perhaps it can best be described as more of an individual or family selfishness. I do not see that selfless dedication to the larger group or cause or nation which is reflected in the persistence of the VC in trying

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to establish a government and gain control of the population. It would not be in the best interest of the South Vietnamese if the VC prevailed, because they are patently ruthless and I predict they would "terminate" a large number of people in bringing their form of order to South Vietnam. Even if such a program was not necessary, the VC have been so consistent in applying their strategy of terror that they could be expected to do it again as they did in Hue, and earlier in North Vietnam. In spite of this dire outlook, it appears that the South Vietnamese are willing to forgive and forget, for when discussion of a cease fire developed and officials were queried, without exception they all said the people were in favor of a cease fire, soldier and civilian alike.

The GVN has been given the means to survive. It has grown stronger while the NVA and VC have grown weaker. The NVA are now fighting on three fronts -- Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, and their capabilities are stretched. In my judgment, the GVN could win this war in three months if they really wanted to do it. If individuals or groups would put aside their own selfish interests; if the civilian and military officials would get out and do the things that are required of them and give the nation and the troops real leadership, the war would be all but over. All the GVN needs now is a will and a desire to win. This we cannot give them and no amount of advice can stiffen the spine or provide for selection of dedicated public servants. It is up to them.

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